



Beans and Melons: Rousseau's Vegetable Garden

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Abstract

This article focuses on a rarely studied aspect of Jean-Jacques Rousseau's oeuvre: his interest in gardening and more precisely vegetable gardening. Close attention to the text reveals that gardening is part of larger philosophical questions related to private property, luxury, space, education and theatre. Some of Rousseau's most productive ideas are supported by references to gardening particularly the cultivation of 'miserable' beans and 'prized' melons. The two plants which were commonly grown in eighteenth-century gardens are at the centre of a philosophical parable in *Emile*. Beans and melons and their symbolical values fertilise larger questions Rousseau engaged with throughout his life. Although he favoured botany over horticulture, he used kitchen gardens as sites of philosophical experiments.

Keywords Rousseau · Gardening · Vegetable · Philosophy · Property · Enclosure · Luxury

Introduction

Much has been written about Rousseau and nature. In his philosophical and literary works, nature appears in three main forms: in the *Discourse on the Origins of Inequality*, the hypothetical state of nature represents a benchmark by which to measure our denaturation¹; nature is not only painted on the backdrop of *Julie, or the New Heloise*, it is woven into the narrative structure of his novel, where it serves as an aesthetic and moral principle; thirdly, in his botanical oeuvre, nature as an object of curiosity offers a respite from philosophy and from society in general. In recent years Rousseau's botanical works have received serious and sustained attention with

¹ 'For it is no light undertaking to separate what is original from what is artificial in the present Nature of man, and to know correctly a state which no longer exists, which perhaps never existed, which probably never will exist, and about which it is nevertheless necessary to have precise Notions in order to judge our present state correctly' (Rousseau 1992, 13).

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the notable contributions of Alexandra Cook (2012) and Guy Ducourthial (2009). For the disillusioned philosopher prone to misanthropy, botany was a salutary escape into the natural world of wild plants and the immaterial world of ideas stemming from them. A letter Rousseau wrote to the Duchess of Portland from exile in England in 1766 captures his views on botany: ‘The study of nature detaches us from ourselves, and elevates us to its Author. It is in this sense that one truly becomes a philosopher; it is in this way that natural history and botany have a use for Wisdom and virtue’ (Rousseau 2000, 173). For Rousseau botany was not just the stuff scientific books are made of, nor did it offer an unrestrained escapism into a fantasy world of exotic plants. Botany provided a retreat from all manner of assaults he endured, real or imagined; it also served as a cathartic outlet. He wrote: ‘Let us give ourselves easy, innocent amusements which relieve us from searching for disasters, for criminals, for madmen. If the study of plants purges my soul that is enough for me, I do not desire any other pharmacy’ (Rousseau 2000, 252). Botany delivered a strong antidote to the permanent busyness and anesthetising *divertissements* of social life. In nature, Rousseau became a philosopher.

Although Rousseau saw the therapeutic benefits of botany for the soul, he had no great interest in the medicinal use of plants. Herbal remedies comprised a large part of eighteenth-century pharmacy. He did not categorically deny the efficacy of herbalism; his interest lay in living plants, not in concoctions of dead leaves. He makes this clear in his ‘Fragments on Botany’:

To the eyes of the botanist plants are only organic beings, as soon as the vegetal is dead and ceases to vegetate, its parts no longer have the mutual correspondence which enables it to live and makes it a unity, it is no longer within the scope of the botanist, it is a simple substance, matter, a compound, a dead earth, which no longer belongs to the plant realm but to the mineral (Rousseau 2000, 250).

The philosopher-botanist surveys the shapes and variations of plant-life as he walks in nature; he scrutinises the natural processes of birth and death in situ. ‘The botanist’, writes Rousseau, ‘studies in plants [*végétaux*] their tissue, their shape, their organization, their generation, their birth, their growth, their life, and their death’ (Rousseau 2000, 250). The botanist’s science stops when the plant is cut down and ground up by the physician’s pestle. Rousseau aimed to free botany from the dominion of medicine on the grounds that medicinal herbalism destroys plant life and that, as a practice, it requires a panoply of expensive medical tools only the wealthiest can afford.

To the list of grievances against the medicinal arts he added a more serious complaint: for Rousseau, medicine distorts the natural order in that it appropriates the world of plants to its own end. For the herbalist, a flower is not just a flower:

The fields covered by flowers are the sole laboratory of the botanist. The promenade is his sole labor. He easily carries all his tools in his pocket, he only occupies himself with lovable objects and only sees garlands for shepherds where the herborist sees materials for enemas. Botany lacks nothing

in order to be a delightful study but to be taken away from the physician and returned to the naturalist (Rousseau 2000, 251).

The choice of the medical metaphor needs no comment. Rousseau's diatribe against doctors is well known. A few pages into his pedagogical novel *Emile*, the teacher declares: 'I do not know of what illness the doctors cure us; but I do know that they give us quite fatal ones: cowardice, pusillanimity, credulousness, terror of death' (Rousseau 2010, 181). He decries the practice of medicine as the practice of agony: doctors instil the fear of death in their patients, who forget to live as they focus on potential ailments and the inescapability of death. The study of plants teaches virtues; medicine kills plants, virtues and people. Botany is more than a pastime for Rousseau; it is first and foremost a study of life in its many natural, unmodified expressions and manifestations.

Botany contributes to a natural order in which plants were created to be seen by the solitary walker: 'I want my eyes to enjoy them, observe them, exhaust them, be sated if possible: these forms, these colors, this symmetry were not put here for nothing' (Rousseau 2000, 252). As a science, botany is not outside of the natural order, as medicine is. It is a natural response to the beauty of nature. In a form of natural mutualism, the botanist completes nature so that her attributes do not go unnoticed. For Rousseau, the physician and all too often the farmer mutilate nature to satisfy their greed rather than their needs. In a harmonious mutualism, the botanist communes with nature to satisfy his and her need to see and be seen, to exist in and for the other without interference. 'The botanist suffers no intermediary between nature and himself', writes Rousseau, as he thinks of himself as being one with her (Rousseau 2000, 250).

In Rousseau's words, plants were created to elegantly conceal earth's nakedness and to be admired by the botanist:

Nature, which has put so much elegance in all its forms and so much choice in all its distributions, above all has taken particular care to cover the nakedness of the earth with an adornment so rich and so varied that it charms the eyes and surprises the imagination; it is in the examination of this brilliant adornment, it is in the study of this profusion of riches that the botanist admires with ecstasy the divine art and the exquisite taste of the worker who fabricated the robe of our common mother (Rousseau 2000, 250).

Profusion in the natural world is not the external sign of moral corruption as luxury is in society. As it vests the modest earth with a rich garment, nature remains simple in her effusion of colours and shapes. The passage above provides no evidence of a condemnation of natural profusion and excess, as one finds in Rousseau's passionate diatribes against social luxury and indulgence. In a note in his *Discourse on Inequality*, he wrote: 'Luxury ... soon completes the evil that Societies began ... It is itself the worst of all evils in any State' (Rousseau 1992, 78). Luxury is then likened to burning winds which 'cover the grass and greenery with devouring insects', killing all in its wake, crushing and ruining the farmer and the citizen (Rousseau 1992, 78). In studying nature, the botanist studies her inherent and deep-seated beauty.

Thus botany is more than the mere science of earth's rich garment. In the vegetal surface of the earth, the botanist accesses the depth of the created world. The epigraph of Rousseau's *Confessions*, borrowed from Persius's *Satires*, reads: *intus et in cute*, 'inside and in (or under) the skin' (Rousseau 1995, 5). Botany and autobiography view the outside and the inside as conjoined. Much like life-writing and politics, botany contributes to the larger philosophical project Jean-Jacques Rousseau set for himself. While botany shares goals, methods and results with philosophy and self-examination, 'horticulture and gardens, on the other hand, offer the soul no solace; Rousseau's botany is therefore a completely distinct enterprise from gardening or garden theory', according to Alexandra Cook (2004, 5). Yet gardening, and particularly vegetable gardening or olericulture, occupies a small yet productive space on Rousseau's broader philosophical horizon. Small in comparison to nature but carefully tended and demarcated in the text, Rousseau's vegetable patch – and its relation to other forms of cultivation such as ornamental gardening, farming and education – is the subject of this article.

In a series of letters known as *Elementary Letters on Botany* Rousseau taught his cousin Mme Delessert the rudiments of the science and passion of plants. Preparing his student for the observation of spring flowers, notably wallflowers and violets, the master botanist warns her against horticultural mutations.

To the extent that you will find them double, do not occupy yourself with their examination; they will be disfigured, or if you want, adorned according to our fashion, nature will not find herself in them anymore: she refuses to reproduce by monsters thus mutilated; because if the most brilliant part, that is, the corolla, multiplies itself, it is at the expense of the most essential parts, which disappeared under this brilliance. Take then a simple Wallflower, and proceed to the analysis of its flower (Rousseau 2000, 133–134).

Rousseau's words are unequivocal. If botany, the study of nature, is commendable and salutary, horticulture, on the other hand, which re-adorns, reorganises, and deforms nature, can create only monsters. The philosopher had even harsher words for exotic plants transplanted to Europe, as was fashionable at the time. When gardens, even British naturalistic landscapes, are decried for their artifice, one place stands above all man-made horticultural monstrosities: the Elysium.

In Part Four of *Julie, or the New Heloise*, Rousseau depicts a garden unlike any other. This orchard is a secret garden entered through a gate that disappears into the vegetation once you have stepped in, so much so that one feels 'dropped from the sky' (Rousseau 1997, 387). Julie's garden is wild and rustic, and the imprint of the gardener's hand is hardly noticeable. No exotic plants were removed from their natural habitats, only local plants 'arranged and combined in a manner that yielded a cheerier and pleasanter effect... A thousand wild flowers shone there, among which the eye was surprised to detect a few garden varieties, which seemed to grow naturally with the others' (Rousseau 1997, 388). The natural and the artificial are unified in a productive 'artificial wilderness' (Rousseau 1997, 389). In Elysium, much care has been given to erase the traces of human intervention, whether in the form of ploughing, fertilising, or container gardening. Even walls are masked with trompe-l'oeil bushes that resemble the end of the woods (Rousseau 1997, 393). This

artificial wilderness still raises a question: 'I found it rather strange that they should take such pains to hide from themselves those they had taken; were it not better to have taken none at all?' (Rousseau 1997, 394). Julie's reply:

Everything you see is wild and robust plants; it's enough to put in the ground, and they grow on their own. Moreover, nature seems to want to veil from men's eyes her true attractions, to which they are too insensible, and which they disfigure when they can get their hands on them: she flees much-frequented places; it is on the tops of mountains, deep in the forests, on desert Islands that she deploys her most stirring charms. Those who love her and cannot go so far to find her are reduced to doing her violence, forcing her in a way to come and live with them, and all this cannot be done without a modicum of illusion (Rousseau 1997, 394).

Through Julie's response, Rousseau conveys his overt disdain for the disfigurement of nature caused by excessive horticultural intervention. However, he concedes that a small dose of controlled violence and deliberate illusion might be necessary to reveal and bring nature closer to those who live far from her. The necessary violence and trickery which entered into the creation of Elysium are lesser evils, far preferable to the torture endured by plants under the hands of French gardeners. The topiaries that were much in fashion at the time are nothing but gratuitous mutilations to the botanist-philosopher. The ultimate gardening abomination appears in a note: 'I am persuaded that the time is approaching when people will want nothing in their gardens that is found in the countryside; they will suffer neither plants, nor bushes; they will want only porcelain flowers, magots, trellises, sand of every color, and fine vases full of nothing' (Rousseau 1997, 394). What is more violent than the total annihilation of nature in artificial gardens where her fullness is replaced by the emptiness of hollow vases? The harangue against gardens and gardeners continues in a targeted critique of garden connoisseurs – prisoners of their thirst for horticultural knowledge, oblivious of the spectacle of nature. The cost of fashionable plants inflated by the insatiable mania of collectors gives the staunch botanist cause for concern. Garden cognoscenti repeat the same mistake in all their designs: 'the mistake of so-called people of taste is to want art everywhere, and never to be satisfied unless art is apparent; whereas true taste consists in hiding art; especially where the works of nature are concerned' (Rousseau 1997, 396). The sign that nature has not been consulted in garden designs appears in the overreliance on manmade geometrical shapes and straight lines. Such designs are not only unnatural but costly; they are realized by the exploitation and suffering of indentured labourers. In the wild, pleasures are simple: 'flowers are made to entertain our eyes in passing', not to be on permanent and manicured display that transports the visitor to a distant land (Rousseau 1997, 396). Rousseau criticises the fashion for vistas and perspectives in eighteenth-century ornamental gardens. Vistas may satisfy escapist projections, but they also reveal the inability of garden enthusiasts to live in the here and now. Such designs interfere with the reveries of the solitary walker. Most gardens are mere places of sociability enhanced by artistic tricks.

Later in this episode, Julie reveals to Saint Preux that Elysium was created with her children in mind. 'I want them one day to become my little gardeners', she

admits (Rousseau 1997, 398). In Elysium, they will experience pleasure and their characters will be fortified; and in seeing them tend to the garden she will also see them return their love for her. Elysium is a place of virtue where illicit passions, as the love Saint Preux feels for Julie, are supplanted by the admiration of virtue. For the wild garden of Julie works its magic: it converts pleasure into virtue (Rousseau 1997, 399).

If the labourer's imprint is hardly visible in Elysium, it is clearly evident in cultivated fields. Agriculture is distinct from botany and gardening in some fundamental ways. Botany is the study of plants in their natural habitats, free from human intervention. Such study is the source not merely of intellectual satisfaction in Rousseau's case: it also frees the mind from daily torments (Cook 2012, 25). Agriculture benefits people rather differently. The second preface to *Julie, or the New Heloise* invites the reader to move to the countryside to become a farmer and to live a simple life. Rousseau's farmer is not a philosopher, but a man of virtue who does not engage in insipid urban pleasures like the theatre (Rousseau 1997, 15). His *Plan for a Constitution for Corsica*, composed in the mid-1760s, places agriculture at the centre of the island's government. The future of Corsica lies in the strength and independence of her people. 'Being unable to get richer in money, the Island of Corsica ought to try to get richer in men ... in order to multiply men it is necessary to multiply their means of existence, hence agriculture', writes Rousseau (Rousseau 2005, 125–126). Peasants are more attached to the land than city-dwellers; they are not distracted by vain pursuits and are more virtuous overall. They are physically strong and make good, patriotic soldiers. 'The only means for maintaining a State in independence of others is agriculture' (Rousseau 2005, 127). States that do not rely on imports to feed their people are free from foreign pressures. 'Commerce produces wealth but agriculture assures freedom', concludes Rousseau (2005, 127).

In Rousseau's political project, agriculture is more than a leavening by which republican governments may shape the bodies and minds of those who work the land. It is also a practice in which the philosopher occasionally engages. In his tableau of the state of nature, Rousseau painted the earth as naturally fertile until it was cultivated. 'The Earth, abandoned to its natural fertility and covered by immense forests never mutilated by the Axe, offers at every step Storehouses and shelters to animals of all species' (Rousseau 1992, 21). The untainted earth provides food and habitation for all until humans amputate her and even sterilise her. In a note on this dire tableau, Rousseau, with the assistance of Buffon, advocates for a reasoned use of the earth's fertility.

First, if there is a kind of vegetation that can compensate for the loss of vegetable matter brought about by animals according to M. de Buffon's reasoning, it is above all woods, the tops and leaves of which collect and appropriate more water and vapors than other plants do. Second, destruction of the soil, that is to say, the loss of the substance suited to vegetation, must accelerate in proportion as the earth is more cultivated and as more industrious inhabitants consume in greater abundance its products of all kinds. My third and most important remark is that the fruits of the Trees furnish animals with more abundant food than other forms of vegetation can: an experiment I made myself, by

comparing the products of two fields equal in size and quality, the one covered with chestnut trees and the other sown with wheat (Rousseau 1992, 70–71).

Unreasoned cultivation of the earth and excessive cattle breeding lead to her depletion. Rousseau may be responding to Locke's position that 'it is labour, then, which puts the greatest part of the value upon land, without which it would scarcely be worth any thing' (Locke 2003, 118). For Rousseau, agricultural practices which are less labour-intensive, such as planting chestnut trees for years of production and shelter, intrude less markedly into nature's plan and do not threaten her fertility. In the following note, Rousseau quotes Saint Jerome, who has it from Dicaearchus that 'the Earth was still fertile by itself' as long as men did not consume meat and raise animals for consumption (Rousseau 1992, 71). The praise of vegetarianism is not primarily motivated by medical, physiological or philosophical reasons here. The ease of access to natural abundance justifies dietary choices (Assouly 2016, 354).

If vegetal abundance and an economy of means vindicate dietary selection, they also impact farming practices. Where fertilisation is necessary it should take the least intrusive form, as was the case in Elysium, states Rousseau. The forest will always provide more than the over-cultivated field, which will necessitate intensive labour and with it the heightened risk of the subjugation of men through forced appropriation and indentured work. 'Vast forests were changed into smiling Fields which had to be watered with the sweat of men, and in which slavery and misery were soon seen to germinate and grow with the crops' (Rousseau 1992, 49). The two metaphors of germination and growth stress that, along with cultivation, slavery flourishes.

The second part of the *Discourse on Inequality* opens with an oft-quoted declaration:

The first person who, having fenced off a plot of ground, took it into his head to say *this is mine* and found people simple enough to believe him, was the true founder of civil society. What crimes, wars, murders, what miseries and horrors would the human Race have been spared by someone who, uprooting the stakes or filling the ditch, had shouted to his fellows: Beware of listening to this impostor; you are lost if you forget that the fruits belong to all and the Earth to no one! (Rousseau 2010, 43).

The origin of civil society lies in the ready acceptance of the arbitrary enclosure by passive and credulous people. With the establishment of civil society comes the right of first occupant. The right of first occupant, as Rousseau explains in the *Social Contract*, must meet three conditions: first, that no one is already living on the coveted plot of land; secondly, that only what is necessary for subsistence be enclosed; and thirdly, that the land should not be appropriated by way of ceremonies or rituals but through necessary labour and cultivation which are the only true and valid property titles (Rousseau 1994, 142). The lesson in property and occupancy foregrounded in this passage occupies a central place in the education of young Emile in Rousseau's pedagogical novel. In it, the classroom is a vegetable garden.

The first book of Rousseau's *Emile* likens education to cultivation in an oft-quoted introduction:

Everything is good as it leaves the hands of the author of things; everything degenerates in the hands of man. He forces one soil to nourish the product of another, one tree to bear the fruit of another. ... He wants nothing as nature made it, not even man; for him, man must be trained like a school horse; man must be fashioned in keeping with his fancy like a tree in his garden (Rousseau 2010, 161).

As in earlier passages, the horticultural metaphors illustrate the denaturation of man in society. But here the metaphors burrow deeper into horticultural practices and their symbolical values. This representation, that the soil is forced to grow alien plants and the tree to bear the fruit of another species, barely disguise a social critique which culminates in the image of the human topiary. The metaphor is further deployed to show the similarities between education and cultivation.

Were he not to do this, however, everything would go even worse, and our species does not admit of being formed halfway. In the present state of things a man abandoned to himself in the midst of other men from birth would be the most disfigured of all. Prejudices, authority, necessity, example, all the social institutions in which we find ourselves submerged would stifle nature in him and put nothing in its place. Nature there would be like a shrub that chance had caused to be born in the middle of a path and that the passers-by soon cause to perish by bumping into it from all sides and bending it in every direction (Rousseau 2010, 161).

Out of the state of nature, cultivation becomes a necessity for the survival of humankind. Cultivation also shields nature herself, who is at a risk of being trampled in the stampede of business and swept away in the storms of social masquerades that brew in and around cities. The cultivation of nature and of man proves a moral duty to ensure our species' survival as well as the existence of the planet. Rousseau continues:

It is to you that I address myself, tender and foresighted mother, who are capable of keeping the nascent shrub away from the highway and securing it from the impact of human opinions! Cultivate and water the young plant before it dies. Its fruits will one day be your delights. Form an enclosure around your child's soul at an early date. Someone else can draw its circumference, but you alone must build the fence.

Plants are shaped by cultivation, and men by education (Rousseau 2010, 161–162).

The parallel between horticulture and education is established in a passage that recalls the Elysium garden of Julie. The metaphor of enclosure hints at the etymology of the term 'horticulture': *hortus* in Latin translates as 'enclosure'. In the passage, cultivation means the basic, necessary care without which the plant or child dies. While in the *Discourse on Inequality* the size of the enclosure or

garden was based on need, here it is up to the mentor to decide how much of the surface might be cultivated. His decision is based on a careful survey of specific circumstances, such as the birthplace of the child, parental situation and risks of exposure to moral decay. Emile's mentor is the surveyor, who is called upon to determine the boundaries of the area to be enclosed and cultivated. He also decides which seeds will be sowed in the young mind. In the passage, though, the first true gardener is the mother, who erects the walls of the garden that protect her child. Yet for the plantlet to turn into a grown plant an expert gardener's skills are needed, and pedagogical skills like the gardener's touch must be discreet.

Raised in the countryside, Emile is exposed to both untamed nature and cultivated fields. One of the first lessons Emile is taught concerns private property. The lesson takes place in an enclosed area: a vegetable garden. To understand ownership the child must experience it first-hand as the fruit of his labour, not as a mere gift that is handed to him. A gift, Rousseau explains, would only convey the idea that the thing was pre-owned and regifted to a new owner: it would fail to convey the principle of ownership itself. A child would not understand a wordy lecture on private property, either. Fieldwork delivers the best lessons.

The thing to do therefore is to go back to the origin of property, for it is there that the first idea of it ought to be born. The child, living in the country, will have gotten some notion of labor in the fields. For this only eyes and leisure are necessary; he will have both. It belongs to every age, especially his, to want to create, imitate, produce, give signs of power and activity. It will not take two experiences of seeing a garden plowed, sowed, sprouting, and growing vegetables for him to want to garden in his turn (Rousseau 2010, 232).

The lesson on property addresses the natural inclinations invigorated by the gardening tutorial. All the child needs for the class are time and his powers of observation: watching, attention and idleness are prerequisites for the lesson's success. Creating, imitating, producing and performing signs of power and activity complete the gardening and pedagogical experience. The passage is planted with subtle references to theatre and performance: creation, imitation and production are all dramatic terms. Under close supervision, power and labour are merely performed at this early stage in the pedagogical development. The association between education, gardening, performance and theatre emerges here and will grow throughout the lesson on property.

The following paragraph hones the gardening metaphor: 'According to the principles previously established, I in no way oppose his desire. On the contrary, I encourage it, I share his taste. I work with him, not for his pleasure, but for mine; at least he believes it to be so. I become his gardener's helper' (Rousseau 2010, 232). While teaching is germane to acting, the terms of make-believe, pleasure and taste used here consolidate the semantic ties between pedagogy, theatre and gardening.

Until he has arms I plow the earth for him. He takes possession of it by planting a bean in it. And surely this possession is more sacred and more respectable than that taken of South America when Núñez Balboa in the name of the King of Spain planted his standard on the shore of the South Sea (Rousseau 2010, 232).

The planting of the seed seals the act of possession. The perforation of the ground carried out in the seeding of the bean and the planting of the flag takes on two diametrically opposed symbolical values. One conveys a noble purpose and is achieved through labour, although for the purpose of the exercise it is mainly conducted by the gardener's help. The planting of the flag, on the other hand, evokes conquest, annexation and expropriation.

The child experiences joy as he sees the bean sprout and grow. At this point the teacher explains that ownership is the result of work. 'I make him feel that he has put his time, his labor, his effort, finally his person there; that there is in this earth something of himself that he can claim against anyone' (Rousseau 2010, 232). The gardening lesson aims to root the self in a natural element – not to forcefully appropriate the land. The child can claim the ground only by the imprint his hands have left on the bare earth. Gardening appears as a benign form of conquest in this pedagogical skit, a form of existential transfer or contagion which warrants claims of ownership, albeit temporarily.

For the sake of the pedagogical experiment, the gardening bliss felt at the sight of the first sprout and the promise of harvests to come is soon dissipated. One day Emile and his teacher walk into the garden to discover that the patch of broad beans has been destroyed. The sight of the destruction prompts an emotional response in the child as well as a series of questions, all cued by the mentor: 'O, what has become of my labor, my product, the sweet fruit of my care and my sweat? Who has stolen my goods? Who took my beans from me?' (Rousseau 2010, 232). As expected, the scene awakens the sense of injustice caused by the gratuitous destruction of what is for the first time understood and felt as personal property. Outrage is followed by a mock forensic investigation which eventually leads to the culprit. The student and his teacher are exonerated. The gardener did it.

Robert the gardener had destroyed the patch of fava beans in retribution for a mistake: unknowingly, Emile had planted his beans where the gardener had previously sowed his prized Maltese melon seeds. In this unexpected turn of events, and a rather poorly constructed plot, Emile finds himself guilty of destroying the sprouted melon seeds just to sow some 'miserable beans' (Rousseau 2010, 232). Robert explains to the child that he had committed two wrongs by taking over the plot without permission: he had destroyed the melon plants and had deprived people of the gustatory pleasures the melons would have given them. The scene turns into a dialogue between Jean-Jacques and Robert in which the teacher apologises for the destruction of the fruit of the gardener's labour and the usurpation of the vegetable patch. The teacher promises to replace the melon seeds and henceforth always to enquire about the availability of a plot of land before cultivating it. Emile, Jean-Jacques and Robert engage in a dialogue in which the child and the gardener are at odds about owning a garden and growing vegetables in it. The mentor finds a resolution to the conflict: the child will cultivate a portion of Robert's plot and deliver part of his harvest as ground rent to the gardener. The gardener is satisfied with the arrangement and the scene concludes with a pedagogical moral: 'In this model of the way of inculcating primary notions in children one sees how the idea of property naturally goes back to the right of the first occupant by labor' (Rousseau 2010, 233). With these words, the narrator resumes his control of the philosophical narrative after a theatrical interlude

in which a lesson was enacted and learnt in a garden. The vegetable patch is a site of productive philosophical and vegetable cultivation embedded within a mini drama.

In 1758, four years before the publication of *Emile*, Rousseau delivered an invective against the theatre in a public letter addressed to d'Alembert. Of the many vices he identified in the dramatic arts, the confinement of spectators within the walls of playhouses, which he called prisons, was ranked high (Brillaud 2010, 77–78). To plays performed indoors he juxtaposed the republican fête celebrated in open air (Rousseau 2004, 343). How to organise such a fête? 'Plant a stake crowned with flowers in the middle of a square; gather the people together there, and you will have a festival' (Rousseau 2004, 344). The space of the republican festival is delineated not by walls but by a central horticultural marker, a stake ornate with flowers planted in a public space, around which the people willingly congregate. This is where republican virtues flourish as they did in ancient times: 'The ancients spent almost their whole lives in the open air, either dispatching their business or taking care of the State's in the public place, or walking in the Country, in gardens, on the seashore, in the rain or under the sun, and almost always bareheaded', writes Rousseau (2004, 325). In Geneva, where the republican spirit lives on, according to her illustrious son, gardens are more than mere places of sociability; they are gymnasiums: 'There are gardens for walking, spacious courts for exercise, a big lake for swimming' (Rousseau 2004, 329). The garden is the first and the easiest station in the acquisition of physical strength from which moral vigour grows. In Geneva, gardens are requisitioned to nurture and bolster a republican disposition. A walk in a garden may not be as physically demanding as a walk in nature, but it still strengthens the free and communal spirit of the republic. The pedagogical vegetable gardening scene in *Emile* and the gardens depicted in the *Letter to d'Alembert* concerning the theatre seed and sustain the republican ideals which feed into Rousseau's larger philosophical project.

The two vegetables at the centre of the philosophical parable carry opposite economic and social values. The broad bean and the Maltese melon had been cultivated in Europe for centuries when Rousseau wrote *Emile*. Neither of the two evokes exoticism, and neither of them has any real medicinal worth. Broad beans were widely grown, while melons were a prized menu item due to their relative rarity and the challenges involved in their cultivation (Quellier 2012, 101–102). The Chevalier de Jaucourt, who signed the entry 'fève' ['fava or broad bean'] in Diderot's *Encyclopédie*, does not recommend the consumption of fava beans to people who do not engage in physical work or to people of a delicate constitution (Jaucourt 2017, 6: 649). Broad beans, however, satiate the appetite of peasants. The cultivation of fava beans in the eighteenth century is well-documented. From the main varieties and their subtypes to the best time to sow, the type of soil and choice of companion plants, broad beans received significant horticultural attention as in the *Encyclopédie économique* (1770, 109–122). The young beans were a delicacy, while the larger, more mature beans were the dietary lot of labourers. Distilled broad bean flowers were used to wash and soften the skin (1770, 121). Fava beans were a feature of the horticultural and dietary landscapes and an integral part of many households. They also belonged to rich botanical, historical and esoteric traditions. Without going into great detail, Jaucourt mentions the quarrel regarding the nomenclature of the fava

bean: ‘But there reigns a great dispute among Botanists to know whether our *fève* or the *boona* of some Moderns (*boon* for Germans and *bean* for the English) is the *fève* of the Ancients. This question is debated in Tragus, Dodonée, J. Bauhin, C. Hoffman, Melchior Sebizius, etc.’ (Jaucourt 2017, 6: 648).² The confusion emerged among new plants in the Fabaceae family imported from the Americas, the commonly cultivated varieties and the beans described by ancient naturalists (Kaplan 2000, 272). The bean encapsulates some of the larger scientific and cultural debates which animated the eighteenth century, galvanising partisans of the Ancients against advocates of the Moderns. Beyond the scientific disputes, fava beans piqued the interest of natural philosophers with a penchant for history. Jaucourt again traces the long history of the bean, detailing its ambivalent status as both a highly valued crop and an impure plant (Jaucourt 2017, 6: 650–651). In Ovid, fava beans were used in necromantic practices, writes Jaucourt; in the eighteenth century, the encyclopaedist reports, fava beans were still eaten and handed out on All Saints’ Day. Referencing Pliny, the entry states that some Ancients believed that fava beans contained the souls of the dead. Pythagoras’ legendary disdain of fava beans, which according to the Greek philosopher contained animated beings, has a place in this complex history; so does the use of beans as a voting device in the election of magistrates in some Greek city-states. The destruction of the beans by the gardener, then, amounts to the ruin of a pedagogical patrimony rich with lessons on nomenclature, disputes, history and myths. All these opportunities were sacrificed for revenge, greed and the satisfaction of aristocratic palates accustomed to the watery sweetness of Maltese melons.

The education of Emile is framed by two lessons involving gardening: the first concerns property and the other, luxury. One of Emile’s very last lessons takes the form of a thought experiment in luxury and excess. At the end of the fourth book, Emile describes in minute detail what he would do if he were rich. In this hypothetical world, he would live and act in harmony with his intimates and with the immediate natural environment. In the country, he would lead a rustic existence in a simple house. ‘For my garden I would have a vegetable patch, and for my park, a pretty orchard’, where fruit are readily available to whoever wants them (Rousseau 2010, 525). The crop would not be counted nor gathered by gardeners (Rousseau 2010, 525). During festivities, ‘the dining room would be everywhere – in the garden, in a boat, under a tree ... We would have the lawn for our table and chairs ... and the dessert would hang from the trees’ (Rousseau 2010, 526). Emile’s garden is bountiful; above all the garden is productive and polyvalent, turning into a dining room when need be. Rousseau does away with the outdoor/indoor and garden/house binaries. The common metaphor of the kitchen garden or *potager* becomes more meaningful with the union of the two spaces. Combining the two spaces deconstructs the idea of an enclosed, walled garden with a specific function. The garden is opening up. But what is a garden if it is not enclosed?

The tableau of the ideal garden and home is tarnished by the question: ‘What about the hunt?’ (Rousseau 2010, 526). As a gentleman farmer Emile has to hunt.

² Translation mine.

With the hunt come the large swaths of land and litigations with neighbours, 'jealous of their rights and desirous of usurping those of others' (Rousseau 2010, 527). The harmonious and bountiful universe of the simple farm is replaced by altercations, tensions and a new social order based on feudal bonds. 'Already things are no longer very agreeable. My vassals will not take pleasure in seeing their wheat ripped up by my hares and their [fava] beans ripped up by my boars' (Rousseau 2010, 527). The situation escalates to the point where the rich man cannot live in peace or enjoy life's simple pleasures. The solution offered by Emile is to walk the earth and claim any plot of land as his own temporary garden. 'And if they come to vex me with ditches and hedges, it matters little to me. I take my park on my shoulders, and I go to set it down elsewhere' (Rousseau 2010, 528). Emile's garden is neither bound by hedges nor limited to one location. His garden is the whole world: in other words his garden is not a garden. In *A Philosophy of Gardens*, David E. Cooper rightfully associates gardening with voluntary dependence (2006, 75). Cooper borrows Goethe's words and is inspired by Wittgenstein's view that gardens provide regularity and order in a monastic sense. The gardener like the monk willingly lives a life determined by a set of invariable rules to the extent that life and rule become indistinguishable.³ The dependence, however voluntary it may be, on a set of archaic rules and an enclosed space offers a stark contrast to Emile's itinerant park and garden. For Rousseau, the nomadic philosopher *par excellence* whose travels took him from Geneva to Italy, France, England and back to France, the idea of setting down roots and obeying a set of rules seems philosophically and pedagogically questionable.

In the final book of *Emile*, a productive garden is the site of a well-orchestrated second encounter between the young man, now in his twenties, and his affianced Sophie. The soon-to-be-emancipated student travels with his mentor to the house of his future in-laws. The following scene depicts their visit:

We finally arrive. The reception given us is far more simple and more obliging than the first time. We are already old acquaintances. Emile and Sophie greet each other with a bit of embarrassment and still do not speak to each other. What would they say to each other in our presence? The conversation they require has no need of witnesses. We take a walk in the garden. It has as its parterre a very well-arranged kitchen garden; as its park it has an orchard covered with large, beautiful fruit trees of every kind, interspersed with pretty streams and beds full of flowers. "What a beautiful place," cries out Emile, full of his Homer and always enthusiastic. "I believe I see the garden of Alcinous" (Rousseau 2010, 604).

The scene of the encounter between the two lovers takes place in a garden which recalls Emile's dream garden described above: a vegetable patch and a large orchard. A manicured ornamental garden *à la française* would not kindle the nascent flame of Sophie and Emile. The simplicity of the environment prompts a comparison with Homeric literature. The garden of the encounter is transported into the epic world of the *Odyssey*. The reference missed by mother and daughter is the occasion for a

³ On life and monastic rule see Agamben 2013.

digression on horticultural tastes in Antiquity and in eighteenth-century France. The mentor explains that Alcinous ‘was a King of Corcyra whose garden, described by Homer, is criticized by people of taste for being too simple and without adornment’ (Rousseau 2010, 604). A footnote expanding on the description of the mythological garden pays tribute to the simplicity of Alcinous’ taste in gardening: ‘Such is the description of Alcinous’ royal garden in the seventh book of the *Odyssey*, where, to the shame of that old dreamer Homer and the Princes of his time, one sees neither trellises nor statues nor waterfalls nor bowling greens’ (Rousseau 2010, 604). The mentor in the story and the editorial narrator unite their voices to laud simple productive gardens and to mock the ‘old dreamer’ and those like him with extravagant horticultural tastes. Beyond the praise of simplicity, a specific term with theatrical and horticultural meanings stands out in the note: the *parterre*.

In addition to the orchard, the streams and the flower beds found in Sophie’s family garden, the passage describes a *parterre* which is ‘very well-arranged as a kitchen garden’ (Rousseau 2010, 604). The term ‘*parterre*’ generally refers to the ornamental garden facing the main house or hall. In the present case, the *parterre* is planted with vegetables – not flowers. The repurposed *parterre* contributes to the economy of the household. In the eighteenth-century, the ‘*parterre*’ also refers to the pit in playhouses where poorer spectators would be standing during a performance. Here too the kitchen garden is enmeshed in a web of theatrical and literary references, if only to convey a pedagogical and moral message of simplicity. The kitchen garden partakes of the domestic economy and contributes to the larger philosophical debate. In Rousseau’s vegetable gardens, beans and melons grow among philosophical ideas rooted in the critique of enclosures, segregating spaces, whether gardens or theatres, and in the praise of the Ancient simplicity underlying republican virtues of equality and frugal abundance. As a botanist concerned with open spaces and nature, Rousseau may have shown little interest in if not contempt for horticultural theory but he nevertheless fertilised his ideas with gardening metaphors.

Rousseau was not the first philosopher to align his project with nature in general and with gardening in particular. Epicurus’s garden is well known as the fertile ground from which his philosophy grew. In *Gardens: An Essay on the Human Condition*, Robert Pogue Harrison describes the Epicurean garden as follows:

To understand how Epicurus’s garden reflects and even embodies the core of his philosophy, we must keep in mind first of all that it was an actual kitchen garden tended by his disciples, who ate the fruits and vegetables they grew there.[...] Yet the most important pedagogical lesson that the Epicurean garden imparted to those who tended it was that life—in all its forms—is intrinsically mortal and that the human soul shares the fate of whatever grows and perishes on and in the earth. Thus the garden reinforced the fundamental Epicurean belief that the human soul is as amenable to moral, spiritual, and intellectual cultivation as the garden is to organic cultivation (Pogue 2008, 73–74).

The vegetable garden yields food for thought and offers ample occasions to philosophise about life. In its different iterations, Epicureanism energised eighteenth-century philosophy. While a history of philosophy and vegetable gardening remains to be written, another name rises from the pantheon of philosopher-gardeners. Voltaire,

Rousseau's staunch enemy, is well known for his interest in gardening. Did he not write the entries 'agriculture' and 'fertilisation' for Diderot's *Encyclopédie*? His famous line in *Candide*—that we must cultivate our garden—must be taken both figuratively and literally, according to Évelyne Bloch-Dano (2018, 73). Thoreau stands closer to Rousseau for his interest in nature and for his mixed views on gardening. In *Walden*, he describes his bean field with philosophical acumen, the precision of a keen naturalist and the dedication of a laborious gardener with an eye on his purse. Why did he grow beans?

Not that I wanted beans to eat, for I am by nature a Pythagorean, so far as beans are concerned, whether they mean porridge or voting, and exchanged them for rice; but perchance, as some must work in fields if only for the sake of tropes and expression, to serve a parable-maker one day (Thoreau 1985, 451).

This passage presents the different uses of beans, their roles in history and their main philosophical uses: beans are the staple ingredient of philosophical garden experiments.

The Gardener's Year, by Czech writer Karel Čapek, who coined the word 'robot', perpetuates and challenges with ironic bravado some of the ideas seeded by Rousseau. This short and profound book is divided into brief chapters organised by seasonal activities. In the chapter entitled 'Holiday', one reads:

A man who has a little garden inevitably becomes a private proprietor; then not any rose grows in it, but his rose ... A man who is a proprietor enters into a certain kind of relationship with his neighbors ... there is no doubt that a man would go to fight for his faith, but still more willingly and fiercely would he fight for his little garden. The man who is the owner of some yards of land, and is growing something on it, becomes in fact a rather conservative creature, for he is dependent on natural laws a thousand years old; do what you will, no revolution will hasten the time of germination, or allow the lilac to flower before May; so the man becomes wise and submits to laws and customs (Čapek 2017, 39–40).

Čapek's humorous portrait depicts a man who could not be more different to Rousseau's creature Emile. The gardener's defensive and exclusive sense of property, his combativeness verging on fanaticism and his subordination to natural laws do not fit well into Rousseau's project. But Čapek's tongue-in-cheek musings on gardening may reveal deeper philosophical ties with Rousseau.

A few pages before the end of his *Confessions*, Rousseau admits that he was not much of a gardener. In his own words, he knew 'something about nature's work, but nothing about the gardener's' (Rousseau 1995, 539). His interest lay with nature while it was yet untamed and deformed by the hand of the gardener. The statement must not be taken too literally. He too caught the bug at an early age. As he was, or so he thought, on the brink of death, the company of his beloved Maman in the rustic environment of the Charmettes in the Savoie region nourished his soul:

By making her love her garden, her poultry yard, her pigeons, her cows, I myself delighted in all that, and these little occupations that filled my day without troubling my tranquillity were worth more to me than milk and all the remedies for preserving my poor machine, and even making it recover, to the extent that was possible (Rousseau 1995, 194).

This is one of the rare instances when Rousseau acknowledges that he did in fact enjoy gardening. The enjoyment came from the effort to share, teach, heal, and make the beloved love gardening for the sake of gardening, and not just for the sake of ideas.

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